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SUBJECT: EMIRATES FOCUSED ON SUPPORT FOR AFGHANISTAN

REF: ABU DHABI 3027

Classified by CDA Martin Quinn, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: During a July 29 lunch with Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and his younger brother Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asia Richard Boucher pressed

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for continued support of Afghan reconstruction and efforts to bring Pakistan and Afghanistan together politically. Afghan authorities had told the Emirates government that road projects near Kabul were their highest priority. Boucher also pressed for help with diesel fuel for the winter. Their political mediation between Pakistan and Afghanistan had seen some progress, yet seemed bogged down in the inability of the respective intelligence services to coordinate an agenda for a joint meeting. Boucher urged the government to continue its effort. The Foreign Minister expressed concern with Iranian efforts to intervene.

¶2. (S) Summary continued: The Crown Prince noted a UAE program to license teachers within the next four years. He suggested that their experience might help in developing training programs for Pakistani and Afghan teachers. The Crown Prince stated that a decision on the possible dispatch of up to 1,000 troops to Afghanistan would not come before the end of the summer and should coincide with public disclosure of its troop presence in Afghanistan (the current 250-man force has not been publicly acknowledged). End summary.

Aid to Afghanistan

¶3. (C) Prior to the arrival of the hosts, Boucher heard from MFA Assistant Under Secretary for Political Affairs Tareq Al-Haidan that the UAE recognized the importance of having an Ambassador in Afghanistan and was actively pursuing the issue. Boucher encouraged the UAE to move quickly. Regarding aid projects, Al-Haidan recounted that a delegation from the Abu Dhabi Fund had visited Afghanistan about two months previously and was told that "main roads" near Kabul were Afghanistan's priority. The Foreign Minister, upon his arrival, confirmed that Afghanistan had identified "roads in Kabul" as its top priority (but the Minister asked if the UAE should contribute to Helmand where the need was greater). Al-Haidan said that a \$29 million project was under study and would consume most of the \$30 million the UAE had pledged in Tokyo. This project was in addition to "more than \$86 million" already committed, according to Al-Haidan, primarily from the Red Crescent Society, the Sheikh Zayed Association, President Khalifa (who reportedly donated armored vehicles),

and the government. The Emirates was therefore "helping in many fields." Throughout the conversation, both leaders reiterated their willingness to "do whatever we can" for Afghanistan.

¶4. (C) Boucher pressed the UAE to help alleviate Afghanistan's need for diesel fuel to weather the Afghan winter, which would require \$50 to \$55 million per year. The Crown Prince said the government would take a careful look at the requirement ("Let me look into that").

Mediation between Pakistan and Afghanistan

¶5. (C) "My government is deeply interested in getting both countries closer together," Abdullah said of efforts to mediate stronger ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan. "We are glad to do what we can." He said the UAE-facilitated dialogue between Afghanistan and Pakistan had been "very cooperative," largely due to President Karzai's positive and consistent approach. They had tried to host a meeting between both intelligence services and the leadership of both had agreed; their various staffs had yet to meet to fix an agenda, however. He said Pakistan was primarily the one dragging its feet and that the UAE would keep working to press for the meeting. Boucher urged him to continue this important effort.

¶6. (C) Abdullah said they would also try to facilitate another Musharraf-Karzai meeting. He noted his concerns that Iran might try to meddle with both parties if progress was not achieved. He said the Iranian Foreign Minister, at the OIC conference in Baku three weeks prior, had made an attempt to mediate between the parties, but that both Pakistan and Afghanistan claimed to the UAE that it had rebuffed Iran's offer, noting that the UAE was already involved. The Minister also commented that a \$50 million offer by the Iranians to build an Islamic Center in Kabul was "scary." Boucher noted that Afghanistan had agreed to send 1,400 students to Iran when offered 4,000 spaces in the university. When Boucher noted that this level was still too high, the Crown Prince said "two is too many."

¶7. (C) The Foreign Minister noted that the Afghan government did not always appear coordinated, citing an anecdote of neither Karzai nor his Foreign Minister having been aware of the Afghan stance "to support India's position at the NAM in Kuala Lumpur." Such gaps in coordination raise questions about staffing and leadership. He noted, nonetheless, that Karzai was often more "capable of getting things done" than Musharraf. The Afghan leader's decisions seemed to permeate "all the way down," while Pakistani decisions sometimes have fallen prey to bureaucratic inertia or infighting. Boucher said the UAE should encourage the parties to talk about border and tribal strategies as well as discuss Madrassas and Islamic education.

Education -- more than Islamic studies

¶8. (C) On the topic of training and education, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed said the UAE had stopped sending its Islamic Studies students to Saudi Arabia due to extreme views among the faculty there. He said the UAE sent some to study in Morocco and "very few" to Egypt. (Noting that Egyptians were by nature easily provoked, he said "every Egyptian cleric" seemed to be supporting Hezbollah and he wanted to see diminished Egyptian influence in schools.) He advocated training local teachers in Afghanistan and Pakistan on site, not relying on foreign instructors. He hinted that the UAE might consider funding, but was not equipped to organize the effort or to dispatch teachers itself.

¶9. (C) Boucher stated that education must include Islamic studies to be credible, but that Islamic studies could not color the entire curriculum. The Foreign Minister said that "at the end of the day," it required a lot of teachers to staff schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan. He shared the

Crown Prince's concerns about Egyptian teachers, who often emphasized religion in "strange ways," partially due to Muslim Brotherhood and Wahabbi influences. It was very important to train Pakistani and Afghan teachers, he concluded.

¶10. (C) The Foreign Minister welcomed dialogue with the U.S. about teacher training methods. He said public schools in Abu Dhabi would soon require all teachers to go through training courses to obtain teaching licenses. After four years, no teacher could teach "in any subject" without a license. He said this was a new experience and might offer insights into training for Pakistani and Afghani teachers in the future, particularly those who spoke either Arabic or English and might be able to join the training programs. The Foreign Minister said that passing an exam was not enough to obtain a teaching license, but would require approval by other "agencies." He said being a teacher was very sensitive, even for UAE nationals, suggesting that they did not want the wrong influences in classrooms. Even a moderate curriculum, if taught by a teacher with a "twisted mind," was dangerous. Noting the importance of educating youth, the Foreign Minister remarked categorically that "we cannot have radical Muslims running our schools, no matter what subjects they know."

¶11. (C) The Crown Prince said that a student who focused only on the Koran and Islamic studies might leave 12 years of education with "no idea about what is math, engineering, or physics." If told that the earth is flat, such a student might believe it. We have to give our top students opportunity, he noted, adding that students of Islamic studies tended to be less academically adept than those in engineering or medicine, for example.

Media influence -----

¶12. (C) The Foreign Minister said the UAE must "invest" in people who could appear on television with a moderate message, even sponsor them discreetly. He said the reality of stark and emotional images from Lebanon made it difficult, "even with the right people," to explain what was really happening. Similarly, he noted how hard it could be for moderate Arabs to convince western viewers of Arab perspectives.

¶13. (C) Many "good people" in the Arab world are against Hezbollah, said the Crown Prince, but the media tended to incite the public to back its cause. "The media is very dangerous," he noted, recalling a story he has shared before about his own son watching Al-Jazeera and finding its coverage convincing. "We are fighting 24/7 what you call free media." The Crown Prince called for more media debate, with all issues aired equally. Some media offer debates between those "100 percent pro bin Laden, and those who support him 150 percent." "That's not professional media," he complained, adding that some stations covered unfolding events in Lebanon from a similarly provocative perspective. Information via the media should not "provoke" radical responses. He was concerned that, according to a recent poll, 56 percent of the UAE population gets its news from Al-Jazeera.

¶14. (C) Noting that the mosques were full on Friday in the Muslim world (and contrasting this to church attendance in the west), the Crown Prince said the UAE tried to ensure that a moderate message was preached there. He lamented, however, the limited impact of the weekly UAEG-prescribed sermon. A mere "52 lectures per year," he stated, "cannot compete" with the ever-present media. Education of those with influence in the mosques and the media must be addressed.

¶15. (C) Responding to Boucher's concerns that both the Taliban and drug lords were increasingly organized in Afghanistan, the Crown Prince asked what the future of Afghanistan might hold. He warned against a leadership vacuum. Boucher cited better governance and less corruption

as necessary elements of a brighter future. When Boucher commented on Afghanistan's many needs, and its poverty in the 1950's and 60's, the Crown Prince quipped that "we were all poor back then." He said Afghanistan had not necessarily gone "downhill," but had simply been "frozen in history." He noted the impact of the Mujahideen, which he clarified were not necessarily following proper "jihad."

Troops to Afghanistan

¶16. (S) The Crown Prince stated that a decision on the possible UAE dispatch of up to 1,000 troops to Afghanistan would not come before the end of the summer. He said the current UAE force in that country had not been publicly acknowledged. They needed to find a way to go public as they raised the number, and that an announcement was still premature. The Crown Prince said each commander his people spoke with (presumably on a UAE military visit to Afghanistan) "wanted us." He anticipated an announcement in the October/November time frame. He also said UAE commitments in Afghanistan were related to "the overall atmosphere" in Lebanon, Iraq, and Afghanistan due to public perceptions of developments there. Boucher said the USG was happy to work with them on the nature of the military deployment (possibly to include PRT participation, training programs, or other duties). At the conclusion of the meeting (after the Crown Prince's departure), the Foreign Minister confirmed "we have not announced that we have any" (troops in Afghanistan) and said they aimed to lift the level of troops while also going public with the contribution.

Gas/oil in Central Asia

¶17. (C) Regarding potential cooperation in Central Asia on oil and gas projects, they believe that Turkmenistan has enough gas for the Trans-Afghan pipeline and intend to explore the project further. He said there were many variables to coordinate before the UAE could sign agreements, and that it would need six months to consult, evaluate and come up with an answer.

¶18. (U) A/S Boucher has cleared this message.
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